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ABSTRACT

A study conducted in a newly desegregated school system during its first year of reorganization revealed that black students were being suspended at a substantially higher rate than white students. The study also indicated that suspension rates were disproportionately high for males, for students from families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and for students in the bottom quartiles of their classes. The study further revealed that while suspension rates for blacks were disproportionately high in cases depending on teachers' judgment calls, suspension rates for blacks were comparable to those of whites in cases involving unambiguous violations of rules (for example, in cases in which classes were cut). Correlation analysis of the data substantiated the hypothesis that race was not a primary variable in the suspension of students in the district. The researchers conclude that singling out one variable (such as race) when examining disproportional application of disciplinary measures may be counterproductive. (PGD)

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SCHOOL DISCIPLINE: POLICY, PROCEDURES, AND POTENTIAL DISCRIMINATION--A STUDY
OF DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITY PUPILS IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

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OF DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITY PUPILS IN SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS*

Discipline problems within a school are often judged in relation to the suspension rate of the students. Parents and community leaders use these figures as indicators of the climate and effectiveness of the school's program, and school districts working through the transitional stages of desegregation are scrutinized even more closely as they attempt to establish policies and procedures that will maintain quality education.

The current study was conducted in a desegregated system during its first year of reorganization to research whether or not disciplinary problems were being resolved with a disproportionate impact upon minority students.

The study team (three Whites and two Blacks) spent over 60 person days of visitations in the schools to observe discipline procedures, conduct interviews, and gather data from the centralized data collection area. The literature review provided "best discipline practices" and some indication of numbers and types of suspensions on a nation-wide basis. This information was used to compare findings with the current study and to develop generalizations.

Reports for the school year 1980-81 provided aggregate baseline data against which to observe trends for enrollment and suspension rates. Enrollment trends declined consistently; suspension trends did not. They declined one year and increased the following.

*Paper prepared for the Mid-South Educational Research Association (MSERA) Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA, November 1982. Dr. Esther L. Campbell is Assistant Director, Tennessee State Facilitator Project, College of Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Dr. Charles M. Achilles is Professor, Bureau of Educational Research and Service (BERS), College of Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Dr. Charles L. Faires is Associate Professor, Curriculum and Instruction, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Dr. Oneida Martin is an Instructor at McKenzie College, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Ratios, by race, for both enrollment and suspension remained fairly constant for the periods studied. Enrollments were approximately 26% Black, 72% White, and 2% Other Minorities. Suspensions were approximately 46% Black, 51% White, and 3% Other Minorities.

As the table below shows, there was: 1) considerable overrepresentation of minorities in suspensions, 2) a higher percentage of suspensions in the target area than nationally (although the relationship of minority to non-minority suspensions was about the same), and 3) a higher percentage of suspensions in the locale studied when compared to previously documented urban areas in Ohio.

- Table 1 here -

The disproportionate representation of minority pupils in discipline cases (as shown by percents and ratios) was the basis for the study. The team then began seeking causes for the overrepresentation. At one level, 29 reasons for suspension used by the system were divided into 3 categories: 1) a category which was primarily teacher "judgement", 2) a category which was a dichotomy-- either a rule such as "cutting class" was violated or it wasn't, and 3) classifications which would have been illegal offenses whether committed by an adult or by a student (i.e., assault with a deadly weapon or rape). Suspensions in these three categories were then analyzed by race and ratios were derived. There was overrepresentation of Black students similar to the ratio found in total enrollment to total suspensions. A similar disproportionate suspension rate of Black students was found in the first category, the teacher "judgements." However, in category two (where very little judgement would have to be exercised) suspensions were very close to the ratio of minority and non-minority pupils in the schools. This information is shown in Table 2.

- Table 2 here -

Certain demographic variables and their relationship to suspension were studied. Those variables were: 1) race, 2) sex, 3) AFDC as a measure of socio-economic status (SES), and 4) achievement (rank in class in a particular marking period). Each of these variables was used in the computation of a ratio which provided a way to review the question of disproportionate impact. For example, the total population of a school was developed in ratio with the number of youngsters suspended from that school. The researchers selected several high schools as representative of the district under study. Detailed records from these schools were obtained and analyzed.

Race. For all high schools studied, the rate of suspension was 30% of student enrollment: enrollment totals were 4000 Blacks, 11,077 Whites, 308 Other Minorities; suspensions were 2015 Blacks, 2451 Whites, 59 Others. The racial ratios were .50, .22, and .19, respectively. Black students were suspended more than twice as often as White.

Sex. The comparison by sex shows a marked overrepresentation of males suspended. In three representative high schools with a total enrollment of 1836 males and 1831 females, suspensions were 337 males and 160 females. The ratios of suspensions to total enrollment were .18 for males and .10 for females. Males were suspended twice as often as females.

SES. For this study, records of children from families receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) were used to identify pupils in lower economic levels. Using this indicator, of the 217 students receiving Aid, 97 were suspended; of the 3450 from families which did not receive aid, 400 were. The ratio of suspended AFDC children to the total student enrollment was .45; for children not receiving AFDC ("non-AFDC"), the ratio was .12. Children identified as being low SES are more than three times more likely to be suspended than are other pupils.

Class rank. Grades 9 and 12 were selected for comparison in each of three representative high schools. Class lists were divided into academic quartiles and pupils in the top and bottom quartiles of the two grades in each school were cross-referenced to the list of students receiving out-of-school suspensions. No top quartile student in any of the three schools was suspended more than once. In the comparison of the top and bottom quartiles for grades 9 and 12, the suspension/enrollment ratio for top-quartile students in the 9th and 12th grades was .02. Of the combined enrollment of 456 students, 8 were suspended. For the 9th grade bottom quartile with an enrollment of 225 and suspensions of 171, the ratio was .76, and for the 12th grade bottom quartile with an enrollment of 231 and suspensions of 49, the ratio was .21. Therefore, a 9th grade pupil in the lower quartile is 38 times more likely to be suspended than a top ranking student; and for the 12th grade, the lower quartile pupil is over ten times more likely to be suspended.

A comparison of suspension ratios for the four independent variables (race, sex, SES, and achievement are shown in Table 3).

- Table 3 here -

In Table 4 all schools were ranked from small to large, based on enrollment. Schools were also ranked from low percentage minority to high percentage minority enrollment (Table 5). The ratios in each case did not follow any trend and it seems reasonable to conclude that there is no particular strong correlation between school size and suspension rate or between percentage of minority enrollment and rate of suspension.

Using all secondary schools (junior and senior high schools) there was found to be a distinct trend in the data toward suspension and size. When only the high schools were used, the trend was not evident, but it was apparent that

after schools reach a certain size, discipline becomes more of a problem, and the percentage of minorities still had no effect on suspension rates.

- Tables 4 and 5 here -

Table 6 shows the correlation matrix between the major variables analyzed. Results of this correlation analysis support the analyses of ratios developed using the four variables and substantiates the notion that race is not a primary variable in the suspension of youngsters in this study.

- Table 6 -

As a measure of student, parent, and school personnel information and opinion on the area of discipline, a shortened version of the Wayson Discipline Context Inventory (DCI) was used with over 400 respondents. The Discipline Inventory is based on the eight factors normally associated with good discipline which were enumerated in the recent (1982) Phi Delta Kappa Commission on the Study of Discipline. Items were analyzed individually and in groups or clusters of items. Table 7 shows the clustering of items and results of the analysis using the minority and non-minority groupings of respondents. There were significant differences between minority and non-minority respondents on three of the eight clusters; on five of eight there were no statistically significant differences. (This was not surprising since a chi square analysis of individual items showed few differences with race as the independent variable.)

- Table 7 here -

It is safe to conclude that, although Black pupils are strongly over-represented in total suspensions, there are other important variables affecting

suspension rates. Sex, SES, class rank, and also questions of the severity of the offense have an impact at least equal to that of race on suspension rates in the urban area studied.

It seems important that educational administrators, particularly persons who have responsibility for educational policy (such as school boards) carefully and consistently question the use of the single variable of overrepresentation by race as a measure of "discrimination." Results of this study clearly show that the courts, educators, and the media have been shortsighted in their approach and that it is time for a careful reanalysis of some of the decisions which have brought about stringent discipline policies in the schools.

If one group argues that there is invidious disproportion of discipline meted out to one group based on a single variable (race), it is equally logical to analyze for this disproportionateness based on another single, equally plausible variable. Thus, use of a single variable for these purposes seems counter-productive.

TABLE 1

SUMMARY ENROLLMENT AND OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION DATA NEW CASTLE COUNTY (DE) SCHOOL YEARS 1979-1980, 1980-1981,
YEAR TO DATE FEBRUARY 28, 1982 - TOTAL DISTRICTS AND HIGH SCHOOLS

School Year	Total Enrollment	Total Distribution of Students						Total Distribution of Suspensions						Total Suspensions
		Black		White		Other		Black		White		Other		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
NCCSD* 1979-1980	58,459	14,615	25	42,090	72	1,754	3	3,668	47	3,941	51	141	2	7,750
NCCSD* 1980-1981	55,146	14,338	26	39,154	71	1,654	3	4,024	47	4,378	51	156	2	8,558
NCCDA** YTD 2/28/82	51,242	13,867	25	35,504	70	1,871	4	2,181	45	2,579	52	140	3	4,900
12 High Schools 1980-81	15,385	4,000	26	11,077	72	308	2	2,015	45	2,451	54	59	1	4,525
12 High Schools YTD 2/28/82	15,028	3,637	24	10,966	73	425	3	1,059	44	1,254	52	95	4	2,408

*NCCSD = New Castle County School District.

**NCCDA = New Castle County, Desegregation Area.

B.

COMPARISONS OF STUDENTS SUSPENDED IN NEW CASTLE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (DE) (1980-81) TO STUDENTS SUSPENDED NATIONALLY AND IN SEVEN MID-WESTERN STATES,* BY RACE (PERCENT)

Race	NCCSD	U. S.	IL	IN	IA	MI	MN	OH	WI
Black	14	6.0	2.3	7.8	8.5	5.7	6.8	7.3	13.8
White	7	3.1	3.0	3.2	2.0	2.0	2.9	3.4	4.3
Total	9	4.2	2.7	4.3	2.4	4.6	3.3	4.8	6.8

*Percent of students; multiple suspensions not included (School Survey for the Office of Civil Rights, Suspension Data, 1972-1973 quoted in Kaeser, 1979b).

C.

COMPARISONS OF SUSPENSIONS (SECONDARY SCHOOLS) NEW CASTLE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT (DE) (1980-81) AND SEVEN LARGEST OHIO SCHOOL SYSTEMS* BY PERCENTS

	NCCSD	Dayton	T-ledo	Youngstown	Akron	Columbus	Cincinnati	Cleveland	Total Ohio
Suspension: First Time and Multiple	31	2	8	12	14	14	18	21	13

*[Ohio Suspension Data, 1975-1976, quoted in Kaeser, 1979b].

TABLE 2

GROUPING OF SUSPENSION REASONS INTO THREE BROAD CATEGORIES (SCHOOL JUDGMENT, STATUS, AND ADULT OFFENSE), NEW CASTLE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT AS OF 6/30/81 (BY RACE)

Race	I. School Judgment Call		II. School Status Offense		III. Adult Offense		TOTAL
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Black	1,808	49	758	34	1,433	55	3,999
Row %	45		19		36		
White	1,798	49	1,445	65	1,097	42	4,340
Row %	41		33		25		
Other	62	2	35	2	57	2	154
Row %	40		23		37		
TOTAL	3,668		2,238		2,587		8,493

TABLE 3

SUSPENSION/ENROLLMENT RATIOS NEW CASTLE COUNTY, DESEGREGATION AREA, HIGH SCHOOLS FOR VARIABLES AS OF APRIL 1982

Variables	Race			Sex		Socioeconomic Status		Class Rank			
	Black	White	Other	Male	Female	AFDC*	NonAFDC**	Grade 9		Grade 12	
								Top	Bottom	Top	Bottom
Suspensions(S)	2,015	2,451	59	337	160	97	400	4	171	4	49
Enrollment(E)	4,000	11,077	308	1,836	1,831	217	3,450	225	225	231	231
Ratio (S÷E)	.50	.22	.19	.18	.09	.45	.12	.02	.76	.02	.21

*AFDC = Aid for Families with Dependent Children.

**NonAFDC = Not receiving Aid for Families with Dependent Children.

TABLE 4

SUSPENSION VARIABLES BY SCHOOL SIZE

SCHOOLS BY ENROLLMENT (n)	Pups. Susp.	Tot. Susp.	Minus Habitual (For more) Pups. Susp.	II I	III I	IV I	V I	VI I	VII I	VIII I	IX I	X I	XI I	XII I	XIII I	XIV I	Schools Visited by Team	SCHOOL NAME
303	33	51	31	42	.11	.17	.10	.14	26	73	1	27						Krebs
388	43	70	38	50	.11	.18	.10	.13	20	66	5	34						Central
397	62	97	52	65	.16	.24	.13	.16	17	55	28	43						A.T. Jr.
407	43	77	36	49	.11	.19	.09	.12	20	77	3	23						W.B. Dupont
482	54	82	48	55	.11	.17	.10	.11	21	78	1	22	X					Stanton
523	92	191	68	104	.18	.27	.13	.20	23	75	2	25						Brandywine Spgs.
592	123	276	85	111	.21	.47	.14	.19	27	72	1	28	X					Hanby
595	111	228	89	120	.19	.38	.15	.20	24	73	3	27	X					Skyline
611	64	75	57	54	.10	.12	.09	.09	33	66	1	34						P.S. Dupont
621	131	312	109	131	.21	.21	.18	.21	34	64	2	36						Ogletown
626	148	313	105	129	.24	.50	.17	.21	31	68	1	32	X					New Castle
627	72	137	51	70	.11	.25	.08	.11	24	74	2	20						Talley
666	122	395	71	85	.18	.59	.11	.13	26	72	2	28						Springer
707 HS	99	151	88	112	.14	.21	.12	.16	25	74	1	26	X					Claymont HS
742	125	229	100	138	.17	.31	.13	.19	24	72	4	28						Shue
769	154	293	118	154	.20	.38	.15	.20	22	73	3	25						C. Read
810	84	113	78	94	.10	.14	.10	.12	26	66	6	32	X					Conrad
842	110	152	101	122	.13	.18	.12	.14	25	71	4	29						Wilm HS
859	157	258	132	169	.18	.30	.15	.20	28	71	1	29						Mt. Pl. JHS
860	154	263	127	161	.18	.31	.15	.19	32	67	1	33	X					Gauger
889	105	124	99	106	.12	.14	.11	.12	17	73	8	25	X					A.I. HS
917 HS	243	480	180	243	.26	.52	.20	.26	19	80	1	20						Mt. Pleasant HS
936	272	581	195	249	.29	.62	.21	.27	22	76	2	24						Gunning-Redford
1039 HS	127	215	105	136	.12	.21	.10	.13	20	78	2	22	X					Brandywine HS
1089 HS	108	146	98	114	.10	.13	.09	.10	20	77	3	23	X					McKean HS
1137 HS	103	157	90	113	.9	.14	.08	.10	19	80	1	20						Dickinson HS
1270 HS	181	295	148	180	.14	.23	.12	.14	20	79	1	21						Concord HS
1758 HS	297	505	245	303	.17	.29	.14	.17	30	68	2	32						Glasgow HS
1780 HS	372	798	262	342	.21	.45	.15	.19	23	75	2	25	X					Christiana HS
1789 HS	391	718	302	378	.22	.40	.17	.21	23	74	3	26						Newark HS
2158 HS	392	784	304	376	.18	.36	.14	.17	24	75	1	25	X					Wm Penn HS
TOT. 27,199																		
Col. I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV					

TABLE 5

SUSPENSION VARIABLES ARRANGED BY PERCENT MINORITY IN 31 SECONDARY SCHOOLS

School Size	Col. VII	Col. VIII
917 HS	20	.52
1137 HS	20	.14
1270 HS	21	.23
482	22	.17
1039 HS	22	.21
407	23	.19
1099 HS	23	.13
936	24	.62
523	25	.37
769	25	.38
889	25	.14
1780 HS	25	.45
2158 HS	25	.36
627	26	.25
707 HS	26	.21
1789 HS	26	.40
303	27	.17
545	27	.38
592	28	.47
666	28	.59
742	28	.31
842 HS	29	.18
859	29	.30
626	32	.50
810	32	.14
1758 HS	32	.29
860	33	.31
388	34	.14
611	34	.12
621	36	.34
397	45	.24
A	B	C
From Col. VIII of Table 13	Susp. Ratio = # Susp. ÷ # Pupils in School	

TABLE 6

PRODUCT MOMENT CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SCHOOL SIZE, DENSITY
OF MINORITY PUPILS, AND SUSPENSIONS IN NEW CASTLE
COUNTY, DESEGREGATION AREA, SCHOOL YEAR 1980-1981*

Variables	Total		Minority	
	Enroll.	Susp.	Enroll.	Susp.
Total				
Enrollment	1.000	.873	.279	.345
Suspensions		1.000	.186	.076
Minority				
Enrollment			1.000	.121
Suspensions				1.000

*Pearson r.

TABLE 7

SUMMARY OF t-test RESULTS (LEVELS OF SIGNIFICANCE) FOR CLUSTER ANALYSES

Cluster		W vs. M Significance		Sch. vs. Non-Sch. Significance		Student vs. Educator Significance	
		Orig.	Rescore	Orig.	Rescore	Orig.	Rescore
1. The way people work together for problem-solving and decisions	t= Sig.	1.67 .096*	1.45 .150*	9.06 .000	9.00 .000	9.41 .000	8.07 .000
2. Distribution of Authority and Status	t= Sig.	2.63 .009	2.70 .007	6.97 .000	9.64 .000	9.85 .000	8.39 .000
3. Student Belongingness	t= Sig.	2.73 .007	2.52 .012*	6.26 .000	4.43 .000	6.36 .000	3.70 .000
4. Ways to Develop and Implement Rules	t= Sig.	1.93 .055*	1.34 .181*	11.14 .000	11.21 .000	12.18 .000	10.15 .000
5. Curriculum/Instruction Practices	t= Sig.	1.83 .069*	1.82 .070*	9.59 .000	8.71 .000	10.19 .000	8.20 .000
6. Processes for Dealing with Personal Problems	t= Sig.	3.84 .000	3.42 .001	12.39 .000	10.15 .000	13.17 .000	10.85 .000
7. Relationships with Parents and Community	t= Sig.	0.58 .565*	1.18 .238*	7.48 .000	8.41 .000	8.32 .000	8.31 .000
8. Physical Environment	t= Sig.	0.61* 0.51	0.03 .997*	9.17 .000	7.28 .000	9.65 .000	7.57 .000
TOTAL INSTRUMENT							

*NS

Df ranges from 325 to 388 (Orig. Data) and 260 to 397 (Rescored Data).